

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 51

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The First Noel

CHRISTMAS Day is with us again. To an accompanying chorus of national and ideological hates, mounting war preparations, verbal disclaimers and accompanying preparations for atomic annihilation, and universal phobias and mutual suspicions, the 1,951st anniversary of the Prince of Peace is being celebrated throughout the length and breadth of "Christian civilisation." Upon December the 25th in the year One of our era, or so the Churches now agree to claim, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity was born in the stable at Bethlehem.

He was not, of course, the first god to be born, or even to be born upon what the author of *Pickwick Papers* would have described as this "suspicious" date, and "suspicious" it certainly is! For it is a matter of ascertainable history that Christmas Day, December the 25th, was first celebrated, not in connection with the earthly Birth of the Son of God, but with a genuinely celestial Birth, that of "The Unconquered Sun," Mithras or Helios, the Sun God. For we do not forget that the first public proclamation of Christmas Day as a religious public holiday, eventuated on December the 25th in the year 274 of our present chronology, or that it was a pagan Emperor, Aurelian (270-275), who, a generation before Constantine's opportune "conversion," proclaimed the Birthday of the Sun God, Mithra, as a public holiday upon that date. Christianity, every time it celebrates the Divine Birthday of its alleged Founder, actually appears in the borrowed plumes of an older and certainly more authentic Deity, the life-giving solar rays.

Actually, Christmas Day, the Christian Christmas, has had a chequered past. For Christianity in its earliest phase seems to have followed the example of other Syrian cults, and to have equated its god's birth with the budding spring, like Attis and other fertility deities. The twenty-fifth of December, destined to play so notable a part in the subsequent evolution of Christianity, is only once mentioned in the New Testament and then solely in connection with a Jewish festival held on that date, and with no reference to the birth of Jesus Himself. Whilst, of course, it is common knowledge that the Gospel stories of the Divine Birth run true to form and repeat features that were already hoary when the Evangelists wrote: Born of a Virgin, nurtured in an inn, worshipped in a stable by astrologer-kings, "the wise men of the East" miraculously guided to Bethlehem by a star, with a chorus of angelic music; such details of hagiography were the common property of a score of oriental cults long before the Church-authorities of round about A.D. 150, when our Gospels were edited in their present form, incorporated them into the growing Christian legend.

How far, if at all, does this mass of legend and of pure myth, conceal an historical nucleus? Are we dealing with a man subsequently metamorphosed into a god, or with a god later brought down to earth and clothed in flesh and blood as a man, as an actual historical person? Or,

perhaps a more probable supposition than either of these absolute antitheses, we are dealing with a composite legend, jumbling together the myths of several gods "who never were on sea or land," with several men, religious leaders or reformers, who flourished—or failed to flourish—at uncertain dates around the beginning of our era. In any case, it must never be forgotten that what our Gospels portray is the legend in its finished, amalgamated form; some stages in whose formation can be obscurely glimpsed in the extant writings preserved in our canonical New Testament.

However, the ultimate truth behind the legend belongs rather to the, by now, probably insoluble question of the historicity of the Gospels and of the hybrid figure, quasi-human and semi-Divine, which they portray. In any case, such problems hardly adhere to the evolution of our Christmas Day stories which, whatever they may have been originally—the Birth stories, at least, were certainly absent from the earliest written Gospels—are now completely mythical in the form in which we have them to-day. (Actually, the hypothesis of an historic Jesus can be most plausibly maintained if it is assumed that he was born in Nazareth, and that he was a Galilean who was not a descendent of David and had no connection with Bethlehem, "the city of David." In the present writer's opinion, a fairly strong case can be made for the existence of such a person as a contributing factor in the present, obviously composite Jesus saga, as it may aptly be styled.)

However, we repeat, all this belongs to the sphere of Gospel criticism rather than to the Gospel legends of the Divine Birth, in themselves, the most obviously unhistorical parts of these dubiously historical narratives.

It must, we think, be conceded that the Gospel narratives of the Birth and Infancy, in the form in which they have come down to us, are effective from a literary standpoint. Disregarding their historical impossibility, and considering them purely as literary narratives or, more exactly, as fairy tales, and divorcing them from the theological dogmas which later Christian generations have attached to them, they have the naïve charm which characterises the work of such masters of this literary genre as Hans Anderson, Grimm, or Perault. They were the work of literary artists who knew the value of restraint and did not pile on the marvels or "multiply miracles beyond necessity." In both respects, our Gospels compare very favourably with their cruder imitators, the apocryphal gospels and the medieval "legends of the Saints." When the Divine Christ has finally departed to join his predecessors, Osiris, Attis, Apollo, and Mithra in the shades of oblivion, the picturesque narratives of his Birth in the stable, adoration by the Kings, and flight into Egypt, may well survive, not only in manuals of comparative religion for adults, but, also, as fairy tales for the children of a more enlightened generation.

Since the now far-off days when "the fable of Christ" was first launched upon a declining world and decaying civilisation in an atmosphere saturated with superstition

and impregnated with the miraculous, Christianity has suppressed its early rivals, the so similar cults of Mithra, Adonis, and their kind, and has thus exalted its own unique character; had the "gospels" of these other creeds survived, the current task of Christian "apologetics" would have been even more arduous than it is to-day! Moreover, like everything else under the sun, the Winter Feast of the Sun God has itself evolved. In the bleak and frozen North, it has borrowed from more congruous cults than those conceived beneath the warm skies of the East. Our English Christmas borrows the mistletoe from our Celtic predecessors, the Druids. From the pagan and Teutonic Yule Feast come our Northern accessories, the "yule log," the holly and, last but not least, the "Christmas tree" imposed upon England in quite recent years by her German rulers. It is, again, a Feast of the Sun that we celebrate to-day and it is the blessing of the sun-gods—all of them!—that we call down upon our readers upon what is now as much a secular as a religious festival.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### THE ELIZABETHAN ERA

MR. A. L. ROWSE'S opening study: *The England of Elizabeth* (Macmillan, 1950, 25s.), is a work of primary importance. A volume running to 547 pages, well illustrated and judiciously written, it reveals the scholarship of a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. Naturally the Reformation Settlement occupies a prominent place in Rowse's survey and, like his predecessor, the great historian, Prof. F. W. Maitland, Rowse assures us that no sect can claim him and that his conclusions concerning the Anglican Church and its Puritan critics are as impartial as human frailty will permit. He stresses the truth that the penalties imposed on Catholics in the later decades of Elizabeth's reign were mild, when compared with the atrocities connected with religion on the Continent, where massacre prevailed in the Low Countries, civil war of the most agonising character raged in France, culminating in the horrors of Bartholomew's Day, while the Inquisition was active in extirpating the brightest intellects in Spain.

As Rowse states: "Men were in for one of those gusts of convulsive idiocy when they kill one another for what they cannot know about, destructive of all peace and concord, of culture and common sense. The troubles in the Low Countries were beginning that ended their commercial supremacy." Antwerp ceased to be Europe's premier city and London and Amsterdam took the lead.

At Elizabeth's accession, England was divided in opinion. More than half the country was Catholic and the religious settlement was unavoidably one of compromise. For the first twenty years of her reign there was little or any persecution. So long as her subjects conformed outwardly, the Queen was indifferent to their inward convictions. But, as Rowse shrewdly notes: "The forces of human foolery were too strong for her sensible moderation. In 1584 William the Silent had been struck down by the assassin, as Coligny and the Regent Moray before him: the Protestant leaders in the Netherlands, France and Scotland respectively." The assassination of England's Queen was projected, but the Babington conspiracy was unmasked and Mary of Scotland was seen to be implicated in the plot.

The Pope had excommunicated Elizabeth as a pestilent heretic in 1570 and absolved all her Catholic subjects from their allegiance. But she took no special measures for her protection. Her most trusted adviser, Burghley, justly compares her leniency with the burnings under her pre-

decessor Mary "until the Bull of 1570 denied her position as queen." For the Papal Bull asserted "that all were warranted to disobey and conspire against her rule." No Government could tolerate such assumptions and continue to exist. Severe penalties therefore became imperative. Yet as Rowse mournfully reflects: "It is impossible for the historian to sympathise with lunatic human conflicts for power in the guise of opinion. Elizabeth's government was forced to cruel measures in defending itself; but, oh, the human tragedy of the necessity for it!"

Rowse deplores the difficulty, when dealing with the Elizabethan Church, in one chapter, as that communion meant half the nation at its inception, while we possess too many sectarian histories already. "The sixteenth century," he avers, "is full of the endless fooleries of disputes about doctrine, even more senseless—since they were by definition unknowable. . . . Flesh and blood can hardly now stand the reading of them: no wonder the Scottish divines of the next century cost Buckle a paralysis of the brain." Large libraries were written on subjects now regarded by all Rationalists as puerile when, as our author regrets, the mental power wasted on these fantastic themes might have been devoted to the problems of "human psychology, to alleviate human suffering instead of adding to it. It makes one sympathise all the more deeply with Elizabeth's Laodiceanism: like all the truly intelligent and humane in her time, she was a *politique*."

The Anglican Church was far more tolerant and comprehensive than the Puritans proved, once they had risen to power, while the Romanists, once they became supreme have never tolerated dissent. As for the liberty the Puritans desired, it was freedom for themselves alone, and all who rejected Puritan principles were treated as heretics. On the other hand, ornaments of the Elizabethan Church such as Jewel and Hooker were excellent humanists. Unlike Froude, Macaulay, and others, Rowse defends the bishops whose tasks were extremely onerous. Some certainly failed; others were incompetent, but Rowse contends that the greater number bore a heavy administrative burden in their endeavour to promote religious peace. Puritan fanaticism on the one side and Catholic resentment on the other made this a formidable undertaking. Not that the prelates were all saints, some, indeed, feathered their own nests, but this is human, all too human.

Until Popish plots made toleration impossible, the Recusants were rarely molested. As Rowse declares: "The same religion that burned Protestants in *auto-da-fé* in Spain and Italy, and killed thousands in Alva's persecutions in the Netherlands was allowed a certain quiet latitude in England. . . . There were Catholics in position at Court: the organist of the chapel royal was one, William Byrd. It was a privilege of noblemen not to take the oaths and not to be interfered with in religion." Yet outward conformity was required. Thus, the Established Church embraced the bulk of the population in outward observance.

Under the old dispensation the bishops were frequently absentees now, all ordinary prelates were compelled to attend to the demands of their dioceses. Moreover, the many married clergy who had been deprived by Mary returned to their benefices. Also the Romanist Mary's leading clergy were now dead or in exile, and the Church had become directed by more progressive ministers. Again the Spanish Ambassador in London told Philip II that Elizabeth was far more popular than the former queen, and Philip was willing to marry her on condition that she embraced Catholicism and received the Pope's absolution with England's restoration of the Roman faith.

De Feria strove to convert her, but his wiles were fruitless and he was soon expelled to Spain.

The Reformers who had fled abroad during the Marian persecution now returned. Parker, a Laodicean, became Primate, although he was reluctant; but the Queen insisted on his acceptance. She was averse to a married clergy, but concubancy and the number of illegitimate children became so unpopular that all restrictions against a wedded clergy were abrogated.

Despite the official change of faith, ancient customs continued. Prayers for the dead long lingered and bells for the repose of souls were still rung. All kinds of observances dating from early centuries survived in rural retreats. Rowse reminds us that the people "of Aldborough in Yorkshire 'having followed their vanity all the night in seeking their mommet . . . commonly called the Flower of the Well, would needs bring the same on a barrow into the church at prayer time . . . with such a noise of piping, blowing of an horn, ringing and striking of basins and shouting of people . . .': one realises how near we are to Darkest Africa." Cattle were still sacrificed in the diocese of Bangor at Whitsun to its patron saint, and relics of olden times still survive even now in secluded places.

Our historian deplors the destruction of so many artistic memorials in our churches and cathedrals by Puritan zeal. Still, many of them pandered to the most abject superstition. Yet, the verity remains, that firm foundations from modern social and economic institutions were laid in the spacious days of sage and imperious Elizabeth Tudor.

T. F. PALMER.

### THE ANNUNCIATION

MARY was by no means pleased when Gabriel appeared before her.

"Good heavens!" she cried. "You nearly scared me out of my wits. I would have thought you would have had more sense than to come frightening the life out of a poor girl who is expecting a baby."

"It is on account of the baby that I am here," replied Gabriel testily. "Please do not think I am here for my own pleasure. I am on business of urgency and importance that concerns you and your child."

"What can my poor unborn babe have to do with you?" Mary had been so worried by her own people on that subject that the intervention of an angel seemed the last straw.

Reminding himself that he had an unsophisticated peasant girl to deal with, Gabriel composed his voice and said, "Learn that the father of your unborn child is not whom you suppose. . ."

"I've guessed that by now." Her voice quivered with indignation. "If you know who he is and where he may be found, tell me. . ."

"Peace child! Learn that he is one far greater than. . ."

"Then I hope he will have the decency to provide money. . ."

"Peace, I say, this is a matter far beyond the wealth of nations. It concerns not a mere man, but a god, in fact the One and Only God."

Open-mouthed and blank-faced, Mary gazed at the Archangel, then as she began to comprehend his words, burst into a flood of tears.

"Come, come, my child, it is no matter for weeping." He was relieved now that the truth was out, and he spoke

kindly. "It is an honour and a blessing that has been bestowed on you. You will be proud of your son."

"How do you know it will be a boy?"

"Well, if it's a girl, what does it matter, the fact remains?"

Mary's tears subsided into sobs. "I don't understand . . . Why should . . .?"

"My dear child, this is not the first time such a thing has occurred. Many a heavenly being has become enamoured . . . that is, has bestowed his favour on a mortal woman."

"I have heard tales of the Roman gods," said Mary. "But I thought our God was different."

"So he is, quite different." Gabriel felt he was explaining things badly. "Now listen to me. The why and wherefore of God's actions are not to be questioned. They are beyond human comprehension. You can but obey and submit yourself to the Divine Will. You understand?"

Mary nodded. She was used to this kind of thing from the village priest.

"The child you are to bear, you will bring up in the ordinary way. I will arrange for you to be married so that the child can have a foster father."

Mary's face brightened. "You mean that?" Her hopes that her reputation could be saved rose with the thought that she could hold up her head before her neighbours once more.

Realising that a guarantee of respectability would ensure Mary's tractability, Gabriel continued, "Certainly, my child. I promise that you will be married before your child is born, and that you and the babe will be accepted by all. Of course, your husband may not be so young or so wealthy as you could have wished, but he will be better than you could reasonably expect under the circumstances."

Mary was delighted. Her tears dried in an instant, and she overwhelmed the archangel with thanks promising to obey him in all things.

Being a busy person, Gabriel departed once the immediate task was accomplished. Eternal vigilance was necessary if such complications were not to arise again. He appreciated that his God found it a lonely task being the one and only deity, but that was no reason why he should lower his dignity by running after village girls. Gabriel wondered if it would not be better if a suitable Goddess shared the celestial throne, but he soon dismissed the thought, it would create more problems than it would solve.

And there was plenty of trouble in store for him when Mary's child was grown. If it should be a boy it would be bad enough, if it should prove a girl it might well be disastrous.

L. HANGER.

### ODD CORNER

The Holy Boat has logged a leak, but Galilee is calling,  
Waves are running higher and the winds are near a  
gale;

The shore is bleakly misted, and the glass is falling,  
falling—

So we want *you* to man the oars—the Three-in-One  
must bale.

A. E. C.

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAPACY.** By F. A. Ridley.  
Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

**WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY?** By H. Cutner. Price  
1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

### ACID DROPS

The present reign of religious terrorism that is now raging throughout the Middle East, reminds us of an old Persian anecdote upon a similar theme. A certain professor made a regular practice of denouncing, in the course of his lectures, a notorious sect of religious assassins active in his day. He woke up one morning to find a dagger and a bag of gold beside his bed. When his students thereafter commented on his silence upon the question of religious assassination, he replied that he had changed his mind, due to "arguments that were both weighty and trenchant."

Whilst perusing a volume of 18th century diplomatic memoirs recently, we came across the following diverting anecdote: after signing the Treaty of Paris (1783), which first recognised the United States of America, the French Foreign Minister gave a dinner to the English and American plenipotentiaries, the latter being the famous Benjamin Franklin. At the dinner, their host proposed the health of the King of France, Louis the Sixteenth, who, "like the sun in the heavens, illumines the sky." Whereupon, the English Ambassador, not to be outdone, proposed the health of his royal master, George the Third, who, "like the moon in the night sky, rules the tides and the waves." Whereupon, Benjamin Franklin proposed the health of George Washington, who, "like Joshua in the valley of Ajalon, bade the sun and the moon stand still, and they both obeyed him."

We note that a long overdue reform is now suggested in and for the Church of England. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have just set up a committee to undertake the reform of the Anglican hymn book. It needs it! Quite a few old favourites seem to be due for the "axe." We hope, however, that the ecclesiastical inquisitors will spare our favourite hymn: "Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee, repaid a thousandfold will be; so gladly will we lend to Thee." Who wouldn't on such terms? Indeed, the above may be accurately described as "The stockbrokers' hymn." A thousand per cent. profit, and even safer against loss than the Bank of England!

Spiritualism has a long, if not exactly respectable ancestry. Away back in the Fourth Century seances seem to have been quite fashionable. We read recently of one in Constantinople, where the "sitters" tried to find out the name of the next Emperor. The spirit rapped out the letters "THEO," but the sequel proved rather disastrous, as everyone present with any name that began with these letters, was immediately executed by the reigning emperor. We rather fancy that, if a similar procedure was adopted nowadays, the number of seances would diminish rapidly.

Our Spiritualist contemporary, *Two Worlds*, has put forward a suggestion with which we entirely agree. It is, "if Spiritual Communion and then a hymn precedes the demonstration of mediumship at our services, it will be found that our spirit friends will be able to come closer to us and manifest more easily." A thoroughly religious atmosphere engendered by reverent hymn-singing, with plenty of appeals to God, His Son, and the Holy Ghost, and, in as sombre and as dark a room as possible, will not only help the spirits, but the pockets of the medium and his friends and helpers. Nothing keeps spirits away as much as blasphemous disbelief in spirit manifestations. May the Lord help the good cause!

The Rev. Frank Martin, pleading for a quieter Christmas in the *Sunday Graphic*, wants us to pray at the beginning and end of the day as "a communion with God." No doubt there are people who are sure that they do get in touch with the Almighty this way, but we are doubtful if the more educated and therefore more intelligent Christian really believes this superstitious twaddle. In passing, Mr. Martin has a smack at "the travesties of religion" that the Bible is responsible for, but he thinks they are dying out, and "the Bible still holds its unique usefulness in speaking peace in our hearts." Give up the Bible? Never, never!

According to the official pronouncement from the Vatican, the recent excavations in search of the tomb of Peter proves beyond "reasonable" doubt that it has been found. It all depends upon the word "reasonable." As a matter of fact, outside the New Testament there is not a line about Peter anywhere that has any hope of being considered authentic. To the dismay of our reverent Rationalists who believe in Peter as they do in "Jesus of Nazareth," neither Tacitus nor Josephus mentions him. The only consistent conclusion is that Peter, like his Master, is a literary creation—and he therefore never died or had a tomb.

After nearly 2,000 years of intensive Christian propaganda in England, it was quite refreshing to learn from the Rev. J. R. Whitehead of Exeter, that "England was not and never had been a Christian country." This is, all the same, very hard to swallow. Was not England thoroughly Christian when, under Queen Mary, Protestants were tortured and slaughtered, and under Queen Elizabeth, Roman Catholics were slaughtered and tortured? However, at the moment, we have our prisons full with Christians (or people who very proudly call themselves Christians), an appalling slaughter going on on our roads by motorists who also call themselves Christians, and everybody knows that the one recommendation of child and animal torturers to mercy is that they are all loyal members of the Church of Christ! In the face of these undoubted facts, how can Mr. Whitehead say we are not a Christian country?

Stands Scotland where it always did? You bet it does. The official organ of the Lord's Day Observance Society gives "unqualified praise" for Crimond and Inverness for preserving the sanctity of the Sabbath Day in all its gloom and horrors. Peterhead is on the other hand "castigated," Scotsmen there having desecrated God's Day by actually laughing! Aberdeen nearly got it in the neck also, but the crime was "leavened" because Aberdeen magistrates stoutly refused to allow any cinema to be opened on the Holy Day. Perhaps we shall incur censure ourselves if we give vent to our unholy joy that the L.D.O.S. is operating as far as Aberdeen, far, far away from London!

An end comes, proverbially, to all good things, and it has now come to our old friend, "Misery" Martin. This gentleman, now, presumably too old to bear the burden of this pagan land and sinful generation has now retired and has left it to his successor to hoe the Lord's vineyard. Alas, however, our joy at this news was premature. For "Misery," despite his advancing years, intends to go on speaking. We can only say that we hope he will live to see the legal abolition of the Sabbath, along with other primitive animistic customs.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.  
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

WE have received many communications, telegrams, etc., expressing sorrow and regret at the death of R. H. ROSETTI. We hope to publish a selection and extracts in succeeding numbers of this journal.

WE regret an error in the price of *Church and People in Britain* advertised in our last issue. The price should be 7s. 6d., postage 4d.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, and not to the Editor.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

## SUGAR PLUMS

We take this opportunity to remind our readers that the Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society will be held, as already announced, on Saturday, January 26th, at the Charing Cross Hotel. Despite the severe loss sustained by the N.S.S. in the death of its president, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, the Executive Committee of the N.S.S. proposes to carry on with the arrangements. A strong supporting programme has been arranged, details of which will be published in due course. Mr. F. A. Ridley will preside, and the guests of honour are Professor and Mrs. H. Levy and Mrs. Janet Chance. Tickets are 16s. and evening dress is optional.

The Christmas season sees no diminution in the propaganda activities of the National Secular Society. In London last Sunday, Messrs. L. Ebury and J. M. Alexander continued their weekly propaganda at White Stone Pond, Hampstead, on behalf of the North London Branch. In the evening at "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, Mr. F. A. Ridley, Editor of *The Freethinker*, lectured on "Has Religion a Future?" The lecturer defined frustration as the most potent force behind religion. He traced the successive growth and eclipse of Rationalism in antiquity and its revival in modern times. The Industrial Revolution had created, for the first time in history, the prerequisites for a popular rationalist movement which, if continued indefinitely, would remove frustration from the lives of the masses and thus imply the end of organised religion.

To-day, however, our civilisation is threatened with destruction by atomic war, and its own internal stresses and strains. Religions, in particular the Catholic Church, seek to ally themselves with secular reaction in order to profit from this state of things. The lecturer concluded by urging that secularism, to-day, must incorporate a sociological criticism. A lively discussion followed, to which Mr. Ridley replied. The branch president, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, was in the chair. This lecture concluded a highly successful series organised by Mr. H. Cleaver, secretary of the West London Branch.

## "THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for the week ending Saturday, December 15, 1951: Harold V. Creech, 10s.; P. Trower, 18s. 8d.; Bernard H. Rogals, 12s. 6d.; J. Hobday, 5s. 10d.; Mrs. A. Vallance, £1; A. Hancock, 1s.; H. V. D. Clark, £1; C. J. Tacchi, £2; H. W. Goldsmith, 14s.; A. Addison, 10s.

Total received to date: £375 19s. 5d.

An interesting lecture was given on December 9, at the Leicester Secular Society by Mr. E. W. Shaw. The title was "The F.B.I., Democracy and Freedom." He explained how this organisation had grown since its formation, and how it interfered with the Home and Foreign Policy of America. Stress was also laid on the fact that most of its members were Roman Catholics. The keen discussion that followed after the lecture proved how interested the numerous audience was.

## A SPIRITUALIST FELLOW-TRAVELLER

THE letter published in these columns from Mr. Paul Tabori, the friend and literary executor of the late Harry Price, did not surprise me. Mr. Tabori carefully explained in his biography of Price that he was neither a Spiritualist nor an anti-Spiritualist, and some of us who know a little of this kind of thing recognise in him a genuine Spiritualist fellow-traveller—that is, one who gets a little more than angry when meeting with such undisguised scepticism in Spiritualist claims as mine.

Now I am not in any way concerned with Mr. Tabori's beliefs, and he has every right completely to differ from me. But I do object very strongly indeed with being charged with misquotation. I am not infallible, of course, and can make mistakes, and indeed have done so; but the way to prove a writer has been misquoted is to print the correct quotation with the offending quotation side by side. Mr. Tabori has not done this for a very good reason. Whenever I have quoted him, I have taken the utmost pains to be correct, and I am bound to characterise his statement as being grossly unfair.

Readers who did not follow the controversy in this journal some years ago may perhaps be reminded that it all arose when one of our contributors claimed that we Freethinkers shirked examining the claims of Spiritualists with regard to "survival." I took up the challenge, and was given a long account published by the *Sunday Dispatch* of the "remarkable seance" held by Harry Price with Mrs. Garrett as the medium, when the "spirit" of Irwin who commanded the ill-fated airship R.101 "came through," and delivered a long and highly technical description of the airship and its collapse—so technical indeed, that it was quite impossible for Mrs. Garrett of herself to utter. I analysed this account of the seance, and came to the conclusion that it was a fraud, and I had very little difficulty in proving it.

It was here that Mr. Tabori—quite uninvited—came in, and I again quote his words:—

"I think it would be best for both gentlemen to ignore the newspaper version; this was edited and changed for the purposes of Sunday circulation and Harry Price had little to do with it."

If the English language has any meaning at all, he here agrees with me that the account of the seance published in the *Sunday Dispatch* was a fake—made up, in fact, which was the conclusion I came to by a mere analysis. Where have I "misquoted" Mr. Tabori? Unless he can substantiate his charge I ask him to apologise.

But he was not content with charging me with misquoting him. He went on to advise me to go to first-hand sources.

to Mr. Ian Coster, and to Mrs. English who took down the seance in shorthand. I know nothing of Mrs. English's qualifications, of course, but I suggested that taking down the more or less incoherent mutterings of Mrs. Garrett which were delivered at top speed required an exceptional capacity in shorthand—much more so taking down a highly *technical* account of the airship's disaster, and still more so if this account "came through" at top speed. That I was right was substantiated by a highly respected member of the Society for Psychical Research, Mrs. Goldney, who—again quite unsolicited—rang me up to say that Mrs. English came out of the seance room almost in tears, and wondering how she was going to put her shorthand notes into intelligible prose. So Mr. Tabori's advice to go to first-hand sources is singularly misplaced for that was what I did. Indeed, I even went further. I went to the Master himself—to Harry Price's own books. And what did Price say? Here are his words:—

"There is no evidence that it was the discarnate Irwin speaking."

Will the reader note, once for all, that the man who commissioned the seance, the man who was there, did *not* believe that any message whatever came from "the discarnate" spirit of poor Irwin. In other words, he was quite convinced that this particular seance did *not* prove "survival" and said so. Even Mr. Tabori will not, I hope, say that Harry Price was not first-hand evidence?

Why did Mr. Tabori want me to go to Mr. Coster and Mrs. English? It is a question quite easy to answer.

He, like the fellow-traveller he is, simply hates anyone to reiterate his complete unbelief in survival. Perhaps—perhaps, a talk with these people might bring me into the fold. And, as I pointed out in my review of his biography of Harry Price, he took good care, when dealing with the R.101 case, not to quote the first-hand piece of evidence which I give above, that the famous spook-hunter did not believe in survival any more than I do.

All through his book, in fact, Mr. Tabori tries to hint that there is "something in it"—something in Spiritualism, or something in the accounts of seances and experiences which materialistic minds like mine cannot account for. I am not particularly interested in discussing telepathy or "spirit healing" or "apports." I do not, like Mr. Tabori, believe that there was "something" in the idiotic Mongoose story except unblushing credulity. I am quite certain that the even more idiotic story of Price trying to change a goat into a lovely young man in front of a maiden pure in heart on the Harz mountains is ridiculous to the *nth* degree. And as for the "Rosalie" story which, we are told, "shook" Harry Price's incredulity in survival—I say that, unless evidence can be brought that the seance took place, it is pure fiction. It was perhaps Price's attempt to write a story like Sheridan Le Fanu's *Green Tea* or Lytton's *Haunted and the Haunters*. I am not a "fellow-traveller," and would scorn to suggest that because I cannot give an explanation of a "psychic" experience, there must be "something in it."

A reader of this journal who claims that he knew Price well recently wrote me that the famous spook-hunter was an absolute unbeliever in survival but did not say so unequivocally because he loved being in the limelight. This can dimly be seen in Mr. Tabori's biography of Price but why was it not there clearly said?

I maintain, as far as it is possible to judge from the various accounts of the R.101 seance and the various explanations given us by people who were there or quite close—like Mrs. Goldney—that the published accounts are fakes and that the incoherent mutterings disgorged by

Mrs. Garrett were worked up by Harry Price and other people. He was straight enough anyway to admit that it was not the "spirit" of Irwin who was there, and it is a pity that Mr. Tabori had not the courage to follow his friend as fearlessly.

H. CUTNER.

## THEATRE

### "A Priest in the Family"

#### Drama at the Westminster Theatre

AS this play ends on a note of impassioned appeal to Catholic teaching and the sanctity of the priest's mission, it may be presumed that its two Irish authors are practicers of that superstition. They would appear to be of the liberal or enlightened Catholic ilk and to deplore the hero-worship which in Ireland is all too often given to the parish priest, that is, to the man himself as something almost divine. The two weaknesses of Irish character are pilloried—the greed for money and the pride of having one of the family in the priesthood, which, incidentally, one of the characters informs us is one of the best financial rackets in Ireland.

Kate Murphy, the central character in this drama, gives up her farm, and the near-poverty struggle it involves, to take on a public house. When the play opens she has made a success of the venture and is in the money; so she is now turning her attention to making her younger son a priest. She had not allowed her elder son, who had had yearnings in that direction, to take holy orders, as at that time she had required him to take orders over the pub counter. Now that, with his help, she is sitting pretty—financially—she can indulge in that luxury to which, we are told, all ambitious Irish mothers aspire—of having a priest in the family. With lies and deceits she nips in the bud a growing romance between Shelagh, the barmaid, and Rory, her younger son. Rory, successfully diverted from his attentions to the girl, completes his training, so that, when next we meet him, he has on the conventional dog collar. Of course, Mother Murphy's deceits are eventually exposed, but too late! Shelagh returns to Cork and to typing for solicitors; Sean, the elder son, leaves home—presumably for heathen England—and Rory takes on a job as missionary in darkest Africa. Thus, her sons having found her out, Kate Murphy is left in solitude. The canons of Holy Mother Church, however, are unimpaired by the vagaries of this insignificant Irish family, and the course of the true faith flows smoothly on, even if profane love gets a bashing.

The weakness of the play lies in the melodramatic flavour of the mother's ingenuous plottings. In real life members of a family understand one another far too well for anything so naïve as this to pass muster; it would be contemptuously dismissed as "just mother's talk"; children are a good deal shrewder at sizing up their parents than parents are at understanding their children.

The picture of Irish life is well portrayed by the authors, and the sordid careerism going on in the priesthood makes a lively theme for a plot. To those who like this sort of thing, the drama will appeal. Personally I feel the value of Irish humour and whimsicality is rather over-estimated.

P. C. KING.

#### LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers.

By William Kent. Price, cloth 6s., paper 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED. Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 5s. 3d.; postage 3d.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

## A TRIBUTE FROM THE CONTINENT

I HAVE just heard the sad news of the sudden death of our devoted and militant friend and comrade, Mr. R. H. Rosetti. Mr. Bradlaugh Bonner, our President, has just informed me of this dire event which I learn with such profound regret.

Only just now I had read in the "Sugar Plums" column of *The Freethinker*, of December 2, about his recent lectures and projects for the immediate future. And now, alas, this ceaseless round of activity is summarily and disastrously brought to an untimely end.

The lifelong and courageous devotion of this witty and intelligent man, so genial in all his actions and human relations, will leave a lasting memory in the minds of all who knew him and were honoured by his acquaintance.

Mr. Rosetti's departure is that of yet another Freethinker of the heroic age, an era wherein Freethinkers were fighters, who devoted themselves unreservedly and without compromise or equivocation to a lofty ideal, regardless of enemies, and fearlessly confronting their threats. The Freethinkers of this classic age are now passing away, but the seed which they scattered so lavishly will come to eventual fruition and will leave deep traces upon the evolution of humanity.

Without doubt, Mr. Rosetti's departure will leave a wide gap in your organisations, but others will come forward to carry on his work.

Please convey to his son and to his family circle, as well as to our friends and to your members, the deep grief which I share with you.

Please accept, dear comrades and friends, my renewed assurances of friendship and fraternal greetings.

(Mlle.) P. H. PARDON,

Secretary of "The World Union of Freethinkers,"  
Belgium.

(Translated by F. A. R.)

## SALUTE TO AN ENEMY

(On the retirement of Mr. H. H. Martin from the Secretaryship of The Lord's Day Observance Society.)

Dear "Misery," we had an awful shock,

Your Christian Sabbath fight, they said, would end;

The N.S.S. would take a nasty knock

If H.H.M. should cease to be its friend.

For twenty-six long years you have waged war

Against the "evil" that we represent,

A happy Sunday, Sunday secular;

Of Sabbaths made for man, we don't repent.

Much have we owed to your Society,

(An enemy is often our best friend)

It has enabled thoughtful folk to see

That Lord's Day keeping filches Man's week-end.

We were prepared to wave regretful farewell,

(Though, honestly, for you we are not weeping),

But now we hear you still will "give us hell".

For you announce that you will go on speaking.

B.S.

## OBITUARY

I have to inform you that my father, Robert Huntington Yeldham, died on November 28, aged 78. He was, I believe, a member of the N.S.S. for many years, and in his day was a doughty correspondent and speaker on Freethought matters. He was cremated, without ceremony, and I scattered his ashes on Dartmoor.

G. H. YELDHAM.

## CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—I am writing on behalf of the Directors of this Association to express our sympathy and deep regret at the sudden death of your President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti. The Freethought movement has lost a valiant enthusiast and one of its ablest leaders whom it will be difficult, if not impossible, to replace.—Yours, etc.,

CONSTANCE KERR, Secretary,  
The Rationalist Press Association.

## THE LATE R. H. ROSETTI

SIR,—I was shocked when I read the notice of the death of the N.S.S. President whom I knew when he was quite a young man as clerk in an insurance office, and when the Torrey-Alexander demonstration was held in the Royal Albert Hall, Rosetti, Guy Aldred (quite a youth) and I joined the band of volunteers to distribute Foote's pamphlets outside the hall. On this occasion (a Sunday) Torrey described the story of the conversion (by him) "of the Atheist woman from Hyde Park." I challenged Torrey to give the woman's name, and he called on Alexander to sing! Foote had a meeting in St. James's Hall (that night) and from the platform Foote told the story, later printed in one of his pamphlets, giving my name. It's all "revelation," which W. T. Stead exposed in *Review of Reviews*, as "a little homily on a well-known text."—Yours, etc.,

W. A. V.

## NAZISM

SIR,—Mr. King's letter will, no doubt, be highly appreciated by Mr. Ford. According to him, it was not the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia and the invasion of Poland, with the slaughter of millions of Poles, that commenced the war. It was the blood-thirsty and warmongering British dropping a bomb on the sacred soil of the land of the peaceful and lamb-like Nazis which did it. And I am sure that there will be plenty of the followers of these Nazis who will fully agree with Mr. King—like Mr. Ford.—Yours, etc.,

J. R. R.

## COPERNICUS

SIR,—In your interesting article, "Man and the Universe" (December 9), you pay eloquent tribute to the intellectual and fighting qualities of the heroic Giordano Bruno. You seem, however, to suggest that because Copernicus dedicated his epoch-making work to the Pope he was unaware of its revolutionary nature. This does not appear to me to be correct.

The dedication was to prevent persecution. That he did fear it is borne out by the circumstances associated with its long-delayed publication and by what Prof. Andrew Dixon White describes as "the grovelling preface" of Osiander. It is as well to remember that Protestant opposition to the new learning was equally violent.—Yours, etc.,

LEN EBURY.

[Our correspondent's view is widely held, but seems to us very questionable. If Copernicus really feared condemnation it seems peculiar that, by dedicating his book to the Pope, he went out of his way to attract attention to his heretical theory. At the time, highly-placed ecclesiastics—e.g., Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa—at the Papal Court held similar views to Copernicus, who had himself previously taught the heliocentric theory safely in Rome itself. Actually, if Copernicus feared prosecution for heresy he was wrong. For whilst the Protestants—e.g., Luther—immediately denounced his novel doctrine, Rome issued no condemnation of Copernican astronomy until the time of Galileo, nearly a century later—1543-1632.—ED.]

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

## OUTDOOR

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m. Speaker: G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

## INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: HAROLD DAY, "On Cursing and Swearing."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. P. D. BROWN (Derby), "Industrial Co-Partnership."

### A NEW PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

TO Freethinkers the Daily Press can be a never failing source of entertainment and amusement and the Sunday Press can usually be relied upon to "cap" even the Daily Wails and Pains. Contrary to what might be expected in relation to this, it is not your *Lloyds News* or *News of the World* which provide the more spicy or hilarious gems.

Some of your readers will recall that periodically the *Sunday Chronicle* comes out with some sort of "stunt" which is well calculated to give a boost to orthodox and organised religion of the Christian species in one of its many varieties. Such readers may remember that some months ago it pleased the Editor of the *Sunday Chronicle* to publish a small snippet of a letter which had reached the newspaper office from a Manchester atheist. The brief retract was surmounted by an editorial caption inviting Christians to "have a go" at the presumptuous atheist. On the following Sunday there appeared in the *Sunday Chronicle* a choice selection of snippets from "tolerant," "charitable" and "brotherly" Christians thirsting for the blood of the "poor" atheist, heaping upon his head invective, abuse, contumely and spite and, of course, prescribing what should be done with and to him. One bright believer, replying to the atheist, issued a challenge to the Manchester unbeliever—and any other atheist—to enter with him into a den containing a full-grown and hungry lion and, of course, prejudged the issue by pronouncing that he would be just like the hundreds of other atheists to whom the challenge had been issued and would be afraid to accept the challenge. This writer, having knowledge that the Manchester atheist was a sufferer from a very serious and virulent heart affection, replied promptly, accepting the challenge unconditionally and inviting the challenger and the Editor of the *Sunday Chronicle* to obtain the required facilities and to make the necessary arrangements. The bare acceptance was published, but nothing happened and somehow the controversy which had promised so brightly was allowed by the Editor to just peter out. Efforts were made to press the matter to some sort of conclusion by correspondence with the challenger and with the Editor, but were of no avail. It would seem that this kind of bubble is easily pricked to bursting and that this kind of religious bluff is easily called.

Some of your readers may have missed the latest "stunt" of the *Sunday Chronicle*, which has recently brought out its favourite hack-journalist, Beverley Nichols, to flog the almost defunct religious horse. B.N. has now started a new "mare's nest." To a full-page start, he has "gone off" with "A Pilgrim's Progress, 1951," which apparently is intended as an effort to whip up enthusiasm for another new version of Christianity. Whilst poking fun at many of those trappings of religious observance which rational beings have long considered as ridiculous, superstitious and hysterically emotional, he attempts to show that, nevertheless, and notwithstanding all the admitted "mumbo-jumbo" and the multifarious and multitudinous interpretations of various revelations, there is somewhere or other, in some form or other, doing something or other, at some time or other, a "Something" which is "fundamental," whatever that may mean.

B.N. affirms his faith as "one of the faithful." "I believe," says B.N., "that the spirit we call God was made manifest to mankind nearly 2,000 years ago, in the person we call Jesus Christ. . . ." He asserts that he believes this not as a pious legend but as an historical

fact, the evidence for which he has taken the trouble to examine. He further asserts that there is more solid, factual evidence for the "resurrection" than for most of the stories published in the *Daily Worker*. Why the *Daily Worker* should be dragged in so irrelevantly is not at all clear and most people who, like this writer, do not happen to be readers of the *Daily Worker*, will be aware that even in this land of "free" speech and publication the *Daily Worker*, or any other unpopular, unorthodox, heretical publication which "enjoys" limited circulation, will have to be both accurate and circumspect to avoid suppression.

B.N. entirely fails to give to his readers any vestige of the solid, factual evidence which, he says, abounds, even for the "existence," let alone for the "resurrection" of the New Testament Jesus. As to dates, he is no more precise than "nearly 2,000 years ago" and apparently his evidence isn't clear enough to show any approximate year of birth or death (or, sorry), Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. B.N. doesn't even tell us when this legendary figure was first given the name Jesus Christ and by whom.

This writer has accepted the invitation of the Editor, *Sunday Chronicle*, to criticise the 1951 Pilgrim, but is extremely doubtful if much of the written criticism will be published. It should be interesting if others of our readers will join in the fun.

It would seem that B.N.'s God is some sort of "spirit," but B.N. does not appear to regard it as necessary to tell us what is "spirit," or "a spirit," in the sense in which he uses the term; nor does he seem to think it essential to define the particular sort, or kind of "spirit" which his God is.

B.N., of course, as may be expected in a "stunt" feature of this kind, must introduce the much maligned "out and out atheist" and raises the queries: "Do these queer birds exist?" and, if so, "to what extent are they to be identified with the Communists?" The deliberate implications here are, of course, that atheists are, of necessity: 1. queer fish, peculiar and eccentric; 2, that they are a very small minority, and 3, that they must logically be identified with the Communists.

This writer has suggested that the *Sunday Chronicle* should make a name for itself by staging a public debate between the Red Dean of Canterbury and a nominee of either the R.P.A. or the N.S.S. on the subject: "Is an atheist necessarily a Communist and a Communist necessarily an atheist?" It would, of course, be difficult for the Red Dean to take either the Affirmative or the Negative on such a question, but, surely, the circumstance of the worthy Dean's support of Communism gives the lie to B.N. and his sponsors.

This writer predicts that the "most controversial series which any newspaper has published for years" (vide the *Sunday Chronicle*) will be neither controversial nor lengthy, because the Editor will not permit controversy.

LUKE STRAIGHT.

---

Needless to add, I do not believe that there ever was a Jesus who said anything. The "teachings" of Jesus, so beloved by the churches and by so many of our very reverent rationalists, are a hotch-potch of Oriental mysticism made up mostly by lazy monks notorious for their filth and insanity; and if a few "teachings" can be cited as worthy to follow, they must have been the common heritage of many peoples long before they were "pinched" by the Gospel writers and put forward as the greatest teachings the world has ever known. Even some of our more intelligent Christians are obliged to admit this truth.—*Truth Seeker* (New York).  
H. C.